

Crisis in France

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[*Audio cutoff*] ... that countries like Greece — which are, after all, poor and small countries — ultimately don't count very much in the calculation of global power. We know perfectly well that no matter how heroic, for example, the Greek resistance movement was — no matter how heroic these militants were who mounted the civil war in Greece in the late 1940s — that in the long run, no matter what happened in that resistance movement or in that civil war, that Greece could never (to use the term of Jack Belden, when he applied it to China), that Greece could never shake the world. For American policymakers, after all, Greece was useful: it was exemplary, it was a kind of laboratory in which a strategy of containment and counterrevolution could be worked out. But ultimately, the key to what American policymakers wanted was elsewhere.

The key, after all, to that reconstruction, to that creation of a new world economic order led by the United States — that, after all, was elsewhere. It was among the advanced capitalist countries, the advanced industrial countries of Europe which, after all, had to be restored to their capitalism. But not only restored, but also inserted into the schema that American policymakers had devised. It lay, certainly, on the vast mainland of Asia, where American policymakers had to nurture a certain economic growth, but also adapt that economic growth to the imperatives of American market needs. And, certainly, the key was in that colonial world, that world of formal empires — that Third World, if you please — where American policymakers had to nurture liberation, where they had to nurture independence, but where they had to assure that that door that they were opening should be open to them and to their monopoly over those rich minerals and those resources that the American economic machine needed.

All of which, of course, focuses our attention for the time being upon France: because France, after all, is the cornerstone of the best European reconstruction. And yet it is in that France, after all, as you come to the end of the liberation, as you come to the very morrow of the Second World War, it is in France that resistance fighters, by the tens of thousands, stand with weapons in their hands and raise the option of revolution. And there you get the crisis.

The crisis is, after all, that France is fundamental to this American schema in Western Europe, and you have a resistance movement that has raised, at the political level, the question of revolution. And, you see, if you study, then, France in that period at the end of the Second World War and at the beginning of the postwar period, you have a piece of contemporary history which tells you as well as any other what the capacity of American policymakers was to deploy their

power and actually to reach their goals. And not only that, but it tells you what the capacity of the Communists was, over and again, to become the reliable accomplices of this particular strategy.

Now, let me ask you to stretch your imagination for a moment. Let me ask you, if you please, to put successive pictures in your head so that you understand, really, what is at stake: what was lost, if you please, on the morrow of the liberation. What it was that the *Résistance* won for all of their troubles and all of their pains. And I ask you to put successive postures into your heads: the picture that was painted by [Italian Communist leader Palmiro] Togliatti, describing the events in France and in Italy on the very morrow of liberation. And Togliatti, talking to that 7th Congress of the Italian Communist Party in 1951, describes the state of affairs in those countries in these terms: "France and Italy were different from the other Western countries, for the majority of the workers were enrolled in advanced Marxist parties, primarily the Communist parties, and allied to them a sizable section of the petty bourgeoisie. It was a revolutionary situation." And Togliatti admitted this in 1951.

Then put another picture in your head and think of France in 1958. Think of that country in 1958. Think of that country a bare twelve years after the liberation. And it is a time when, in the French legislature, there are fourteen deputies who were high-ranking officials in the Vichy regime. There were two members of the government who were high-ranking members of the Vichy regime. And you have General de Gaulle scraping the Constitution of the Fourth Republic and installing in 1958 the authoritarian Fifth Republic. And you have the fourth year of a war waged against the Algerian people by an officer corps of the French Army that is perfectly barbaric and perfectly imperialistic.

And put a third picture on your head, and talk about the role of American capitalism in France and the role of American economic interest in France. And between 1958 and '64 — which are six years that are supposed to represent that kind of Gaullist nationalism, in which it is France for the French — and precisely in those six years, the foreign investments in France quadrupled, and two-thirds of those foreign investments were American. It is the foundation of what [French journalist Jean-Jacques] Servan-Schreiber would call the *défi américain*: the challenge of the United States over the economy of France, and indeed of Europe, that sectors of the French economy, in their totality, fell into the hands of American entrepreneurs and firms; that various French trusts came under the control of their American counterparts. So it is Chrysler which takes over Simca; so it is General Electric which takes over the electronic trust of Bull in France; so it is Standard Oil that comes virtually to monopolize the refining and distribution of petroleum in France; so it is IBM that comes to monopolize the computer and information market of that country. Yes, if we look at France we see a great deal of the architecture of contemporary society, and we begin to know a great deal about the purposes of those who made those designs.

And if we want to understand really what was at stake in 1949, we have to turn the clock back somewhat. And we have to go back to those years before the war, to the mid-30s in France to understand something about what was happening, politically and socially, in that country right on the eve of the war. What I am talking about is, of course, that from 1934 through '38, you get the development of a movement that we call the Popular Front movement, which is a major movement of the left in France. That when all of Europe seems to be going to the right, when all of Europe is succumbing to fascism, when all of Europe is succumbing to those conservative regimes that are repressing the workers in the cadre of the Depression, suddenly a movement is mounted, which is a movement to the left. And we have studied together, many of us here, the modalities of that Popular Front. And that I do not want to repeat. But I must tell you some things about it, because I have an hypothesis about the conjuncture between the Popular Front and Vichy, and then the conjuncture between Vichy and the imperative of revolution in 1945, which it seems important for me to try to develop with you.

And when we talk about the Popular Front of the '30s, we are talking about a movement that is rooted in mass mobilization. And note it well, because it is that which so much frightens the capitalist class of France, that frightens their allies in the press and the administration, and that frightens their clientele among the small and medium-sized property holders of France. That puts them in a kind of panic. Now, that mass mobilization, even though it responded in part to the Depression of the '30s, responded mainly to the threat of fascism. And that threat of 1934 which was responded to, that threat of fascism, was twofold.

It was, of course, the reality of Hitler's Germany. That Hitler's Nazi Party had triumphed in Germany and had destroyed and shackled the German working class and its opposition. But it was in response also to the potentiality of a French fascism. That there were the semi-fascist leagues, the Croix-de-Feu, the Solidarité française, that had mounted a movement, culminating on the 6th of February of 1934 — exactly forty years ago — mounting a movement to try to take the Palais Bourbon and overthrow the Third Republic.

And it is those events of the 6th of February 1934 which called for a response on the part of French workers. And that response is astonishing and magnificent, for a week later, on the 12th of February, answering the call of the Socialist Party of France and of the CGT — the General Confederation of Labor — there was a general strike which involved a million men and women who marched together under the banner of republican defense. They would not let that Third Republic fall to fascism. And you move from that mass mobilization to the political plane in '34 and '35. And the political plane is catalyzed by an alliance among the left-wing parties of France: the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, and the petty-bourgeois Radical Party. They came together in an alliance for a *rassemblement populaire*, for a popular assembly. And they make a common program around the slogan of "Bread and Peace and Republican Defense." And they agree that they will go together to the election of 1936. And on the *deuxième tour*, the second

ballot, they will withdraw all candidates except the strongest, all three parties supporting a single candidate. They will go for broke at these elections. And it works.

In the elections of April and May of 1936, it is a victory for the Popular Front coalition: that those three parties together elect 386 deputies, and their right-wing opposition elects 222 deputies. And it means a cabinet headed by a Socialist for the first time in French history: Léon Blum becomes the prime minister in a cabinet that is composed of Socialists and of Radicals, with the support of the Communists in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. And all of that for bread and peace and for republican defense, *"pour refaire la France,"* as the document said: to renovate and to remake France.

But you move from that political level to a potentially revolutionary level, a potentially revolutionary level by the intervention of the mass in 1936, in an astonishing way. Because even as Blum is taking office, even as that Popular Front ministry is to be installed, the workers — spontaneously, infectiously, with a creativity that one does not generally accord to them — those workers went into a strike movement that was phenomenal. That, from the beginning of May until the end of July of 1936, there were 2 million men and women on strike in 12,000 separate strikes. And that in those 12,000 strikes, in 9,000 cases they occupied the factories or the shops. They sat down in them. They captured the machines and danced around them. And suddenly, the workers are in the factories and they are theirs.

And the Popular Front government is in a panic, because Blum is legalistic and timid. And the Radicals certainly want no nationalization of property. And surely the bosses are in a panic, for the moment they are afraid that everything will be lost. And they rush into an accord. And the government arranges, on that night of the 7th of June of 1936, in that arrangement that Blum works out: an accord between the General Confederation of Labor (the CGT) and the CGPF (the General Confederation of French Employers, represented by Monsieur [René-Paul] Duchemin, the great man of the chemical industry) and they come together at that Matignon Accord, in the Matignon palace of Léon Blum. And they strike an accord, and the employers are glad to get off the hook. Why not this accord, if they can save something? And they agree to collective contracts, which is important, because so many employers refuse to follow suit when there were contracts in one sector of a given trade. Now, contracts would be collective industry-wide. That there were to be 7-15% wage increases. Most importantly, there was to be the 40-hour week, 8 hours a day on five days. There were to be workers' delegates in order to break somewhat the arbitrary power of the employers, to be followed by the parliamentary law two weeks later that the workers were to have two-week paid holidays. And that movement of the strike was thereby ended, and co-opted.

And the question rises, really: Could more have happened in the mid-30s? Did the Popular Front fall very short? Did the leaders betray the workers? Could a revolution have happened? Now, in

cool retrospect, after the act, we all say that there was really no revolutionary situation in the mid-30s; and that if Marceau Pivert, that left-wing Socialist, said, "*Tout est possible!*" – "Everything is possible" – he was taking through, really, his hat. That, after all, there was a Depression in France, but it was not as deep as in Germany or the United States; that it would not have really caused a revolutionary *élan* among workers. That, in the second place, the workers themselves, even if they acted heroically in that strike movement, weren't so politicized. Look at the numbers of membership in the Socialist and Communist parties: 200,000 in the Socialist Party, 300,000 in the Communist Party, only a half million together, a tiny percentage of the French population. Consider, after all, that the workers are not reading their own labor press, but the mass press is *Paris-Soir*, which is a bourgeois newspaper. Consider, if you please, that there was, in that kind of situation of 1936, still the peasantry to account for. That France was still 40% rural and that the peasant, no matter what his condition, had that affection for private property. All that we say after the fact.

But that's very unhistorical. That it removes the situation from its historical context, that it removes it from the process — that if you took all the variables of 1917 and added them together, they would not add up to the Russian Revolution. And yet it happened. What is closer to the reality, when we say that a revolution really wasn't possible? What was closer to the reality were two things: first of all, that none of the Popular Front parties either conceived of or wanted a revolution. And secondly, that the working class, no matter how creative it was, no matter how revolutionary its method, could never by itself pose revolutionary goals in 1936. Because when you talk about the parties, you are talking, first off, about the strategy of Frontism. And if there is anything that the Popular Front proves to us or leaves us as a legacy, is that Frontism generally is a non-revolutionary strategy because it combines classes. It combines working class and bourgeoisie. It combines the party representatives of those classes. And, perforce, the program of Frontism must come to rest at the lowest common denominator: at the program of the most conservative sector of that alliance. And in the case of France, that was the Radical Party. And the Radical Party in no way was revolutionary. It was basically a conservative party. What the Radicals wanted, after all, was republican defense. And when you mean republican defense, as a Radical, you mean a defense of the entire political armature, of the entire social order, that is represented by capitalist France. It is to defend the Third Republic intact, and that certainly means that you will make no structural changes.

So far as the Socialists were concerned, if there were a small sector that was revolutionary on the left, as headed by Marceau Pivert, the mainstream was Blumist and followed Léon Blum. And Blum was timid and legalistic. And he did make a kind of Talmudic, Jesuitical distinction when he went into office. And he said that, for Socialists, there is a difference between what he called the "occupation and the exercise of power," and, on the other hand, the "seizure of power." He said, "We are occupying power, which is something defensive, in order to prevent reactionary fascists from occupying power. We are exercising power which is contractual. We have made a

contract with the progressive bourgeoisie, but we have not seized power, and we cannot act as though we have seized power."

And so far as the Communists were concerned, they were wedded to Stalin's line. And Stalin's line was the line of collaboration with the bourgeoisie against fascism: to get that Radical Party, as the ally of the Communists, to defend that Franco-Soviet Treaty of 1935. In other words, the Communist position was a function of Soviet security, a function of Soviet foreign policy. And it would do little or nothing to jeopardize that alliance with the bourgeoisie against fascism.

All of which means that the Popular Front government wasn't revolutionary. What it did, after all, in that ten-week period — which is all that it really functioned, creatively — in that ten-week period from June through August of 1936, when it had that solid phalanx of workers at its back, all it did was to push through a raft of these particular social laws. But as far as attacking industry (say you will nationalize), attacking the banks (and say you will nationalize), nothing of that, nor attacking the administrative armature. And note this well: no change of personnel, no change of power, for the judges in the courts, for the prefects in the provinces, for the administration in the diplomacy or in the police. All of the people who really govern day-by-day, they were kept *en plus*. And remember that well, because, after all, any society that is complex is like a kind of iceberg and what you see on top above the surface — as elected representatives, as parliaments, as ministries — all of that is a very minor part. What really there is that governs daily is not elected by people, is not controlled by people. It is a permanent under-secretariat, it is a permanent bureaucracy. They are those people, after all, who interpret the law, administer it, intimidate with that law. And in France, you see, it was terribly oppressive. It was all of the so-called *grands corps de l'État*. In other words, there was the Council of State and the *corps de l'État*, and all of that *magistrature* in the courts, and all of that inspectorate of finance, all of those bureaucrats who came out of the *grandes écoles*: rich elitists who hated the Popular Front, who would take their revenge against it; not one of them was changed.

And the workers, you see, they were hellishly creative in those strikes. But when it came right down to it, there was nobody to tell them otherwise. They thought that the solution to their problem was to send their men to parliament who would do their bidding to get some good laws in that way, to break the power of the bosses. But I ask you, if those men are then sent out of parliament, if they're put in concentration camps, if the laws are abrogated, then what?

And so that's not the question. The question about the Popular Front really isn't the question of whether a revolution could have happened. Nobody was making that. The real question is here: Why, if the Popular Front was a mild New Deal — why, if the Popular Front was a mild reformism — why was it so attacked and why did it fail? And that's the crucial question.

Because that Popular Front didn't last very long. Blum's government lasted a year. But from the fall of 1936, he was already talking about a "*pause*," by which he meant that no other legislation could go through. And then he threw in the sponge in 1937, and gave way to Camille Chautemps, a perfectly conservative member of the Radical Party, who organized a ministry of a few Socialists and mainly Radicals. And Blum comes back for a second breath, and that in March of 1938. And he lasts for twenty-seven days, until the 10th of April of that year of 1938. And then, note it well, he gives way to Édouard Daladier. And Daladier heads a government still calling itself *Front populaire*. And there are no Socialists in it; they're all Radicals. And look up and down that list of that Daladier government. There is Georges Mandel at the Ministry of Colonies: perfectly imperialistic type. There is Albert Sarraut at the Ministry of the Interior, the very one who had cried a decade before, "*Le communisme, voilà l'ennemi*": that communism is the enemy of their society. And they're there at finance, Paul Reynaud. Reynaud – hellishly intelligent, conservative as they come, tied to the bank – who would begin to strip away the social gains that had been made in June of 1936.

And so it was that disenchantment set in. And how would you feel if you had been those French workers — who had done something phenomenal, who had suddenly become the subjects and not the objects of history, who had forced Duchemin to negotiate the Matignon Agreement, who had filled the unions of the CGT so that from 1 million it went to 4 million — how would you feel in 1938, when now your government was out of power, when you were being sent off into unemployment for strike activity, when your occupations of the factories were being simply ousted by police brutality... How would you feel?

And the workers went out of their unions. And Reynaud finished it all, the *loi-décret* of the 13th of November of 1938. And Reynaud, a good hard money man, said that France is in a Depression. And that, after all, there is this constant imbalance of trade, and there are these imbalanced budgets, and France is in debt. And so came the decrees of the 13th of November: that there would be a 2% across the board surtax, the same on everybody. That, in the second place, all kinds of non-military expenditures would be drastically cut. And in the third place, that, to raise productivity, the 40-hour week was to be set aside. The workers responded as best they could, with the general strike of the 30th of November of 1938. And they responded, after all, with a strike that was just exemplary. That was just a symbol: no occupation of the factories, just one day, not very good representation. And then, it all died.

And the question is why that died — why mild reformism died? And you must understand that or you cannot understand the early '40s in France or you cannot understand the crisis of '45. And, in part, of course, there are the expert reasons. In part it's because it is very difficult within the cadre of a capitalist society to make a reform program in time of depression. That it is literally true that France had an unbalanced budget, that capital was fleeing the country because investors were hostile to the Popular Front, that there was a trade imbalance — all of that is a very difficult

context. Secondly, there was that difficulty of the so-called international conjuncture. And that is that the Popular Front emerged exactly as the Spanish Civil War emerged, and that split the ministry. And it split the allies in the Popular Front because Blum followed a non-intervention policy in Spain. And that pleased the Radicals, but it greatly displeased the Communists. In the third place, after all, those Radicals never wanted the Popular Front as a real reforming thing, and the further it went, the more they hated it. And they decided to do it in. All of that is true, but not to the point.

To the point is something fundamental. And that is that, when the French ruling class got its second wind and when that first fright passed, it counterattacked. And it counterattacked in the parliament; and it counterattacked in the press; and, mainly, it counterattacked in the factory, where it had power.

And so you get, after all, in the Chamber, those most outrageous attacks against Blum and the Popular Front leadership by right-wing deputies who are the mouthpieces of a French capitalism that suddenly has recovered its nerve. And here we are in October of 1936, in the Chamber of Deputies in France. And there is Pierre Flandin. And you know about Flandin. You know that this Flandin, after all, who looked very elegant as a French politician is supposed to look — who had a year as prime minister in 1934; who would become notorious in October of 1938 by openly congratulating Hitler on the Munich Agreement; who would sit in France after the defeat of 1940 and talk to his Nazi friends that the Gaullists up in London were, after all, in the pay of international Jewish capitalists — and this Flandin stood, then, in Chamber and was to say to Blum: "We have not come here, sir, to save the sordid materialism of the masses," by which was meant that there would be not only no reforms, but a counterattack. Or take the press, if you can bear to read it, *la grande presse* of that period, which says that the foreigners have come in, that the agitators have come in. That all of those foreign elements — read Blum — have come in, after all, to destroy what is the fabric of French society. But mainly, we say it is in the factories.

And there is Simone Veil, that marvelous girl...

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...and writing up what she heard, because in one of those compartments opposite her, two French industrialists who were talking about what the Matignon Accord meant and one of them said to the other, "For us, for us, the French employers, we have reached the Marne," which means that the resistance begins. And in the CGTF, the General Confederation of French Employers, they did a flip-flop. And they said that Duchemin, that great chemical baron, had sold them out when he had gone to Matignon, that he was really soft on workers. And, consequently, that employer association, now taken over by the hards — by the Rothschilds, by the De Wendels, by the heavy goods industry people — and they took it over, and they put in

one of their henchmen named [Claude-Joseph] Gignoux as the president of the CGPF. And he made an investiture speech in August of 1936, which is a masterpiece, and in which the key line, published then in brochures, is *patrons seront patrons*: bosses act like bosses. And so it began, that counterattack.

And the point is worth making, because there was nothing much of an attack. And the counterattack is out of all proportion to it. And, you see, we can understand what Victor Hugo means in *Les Châtiments* when he talks about the punishment that Louis-Napoleon had to reap against the French workers, because those French workers had made June of 1848. And we can understand [Adolphe] Thiers in 1871, reaping his vengeance against the Commune because that was a revolution. But the point for us to understand, is that all it took was not a threat to the social system — all it took was the collectivity of workers demanding reforms. All it took was the questioning of the validity and the justice of the whole social order to bring forth a counterattack of monumental proportions.

And between that – I hypothesize – that between that and Vichy is a conjuncture. Because the counterattack begins in the days of the Popular Front, and what culminates in Vichy, after all, is counterrevolution. Because there it is institutionalized, and there it is crystallized, and there the arrogance of those people who dare to speak is finally put down and crushed. And we get it in [Georges] Bernanos, that good, traditional, Catholic conservative, who understood the French bourgeoisie well and who writes in *Lettre aux Anglais (Letter to the English)* — which I recommend to your attention for the mood of that bourgeoisie in 1940 — who writes in that *Lettre aux Anglais* of 1940, this: "Yesterday, as today, the French bourgeoisie is consumed by fear of revolution. It claims to be patriotic, but it defines *la patrie* only in terms of its own interest." But they were the bishops who, after all, have the word. They were the bishops who told us what it was about, because the bishops of France met in a religious week in February of 1941. And in the acts of that religious week, one reads this magnificent expression: "The year of degradation in our contemporary French history was not 1940 when we lost honorably to a foreign enemy, but 1936 when we were subverted from within." And, you see, we say that Charles Maurras and the *Action Française* are cuckoo. That Charles Maurras, after all, when he said "Rather Hitler than Blum," that he's an extremist. And the point I want to make to you is that Maurras is an extremist, but at Vichy, among the capitalists of France, among the great administrators, and among the small- and medium-sized property holders, who were their clients, there were combinations and permutations of that sentiment. And that Vichy, then, must be looked at as counterrevolutionary.

Well, Vichy. It begins with the armistice of Rethondes, does it not? And the armistice of Rethondes is made on the 25th of June of 1940, the armistice between the French government and the German government. And it's the armistice which divides France in two, and decides that 55% — the richest, largest half – will belong to the German occupation. And there the German

law will be fiat. And then, in the southern 45% there will be, presumably, French administration and a French government centered at Vichy. And the collaboration begins. The so-called independent Vichy regime begins. But, you see, the question we have to ask, and the question that really is rarely asked, the question we have to ask is: Why that armistice? Why that armistice of the 25th of June of 1940? Was it a military decision or something more? Was it political?

Now, granted, the military situation for France was not good, that the German blitzkrieg was immensely successful. The blitzkrieg, which began on the 10th of May of 1940, pierced the Maginot Line and swept the German armies easily into France, and that they occupied easily the north and the east of France, and that by the 15th of June 1940, they were in Paris. And the French government had fled and was in Bordeaux. And the question is: Could the French have gone on? And if they could have gone on: At what cost? And that is all important and crucial to your understanding. Because it wasn't a military question. And if there is a debate between the ministry and the army, the ministry of Paul Reynaud — which has been instituted on the 21st of March of 1940 to replace the Daladier ministry, and which has Philippe Pétain, Marshal Pétain, as the vice premier — if there is a debate between that ministry and the chief of the French Army, General Maxime Weygand, it is not really about military things, because it was possible for France to continue the war, but under certain circumstances.

To continue the war in the spring of 1940 and in the summer would have meant, quite obviously, to strengthen the British alliance, would have meant to hope that the United States came in — but would have meant, fundamentally, an evacuation of France, would have meant that the government would have had to leave and become an exile government. So that the points of attacks upon the Germans would have been two-fold: would have been, first of all and crucially, the empire. The empire was intact, and the empire sat on the Mediterranean. The empire was in North Africa, after all. And there is General [Charles] Noguès, who is French commander in North Africa, wiring to the ministry on the 18th of June, even after the armistice is being sought, and saying, "We in North Africa, we in the empire, want to fight." And even in the ministry, on the 19th of June, it was voted that the Assembly and part of the government should go to North Africa. And you know that, on the 21st of June, came that bizarre affair in which thirty deputies and one senator actually sailed on a ship, the *Massilia*, and went off to Morocco, only to be treated three weeks later as rather enemies of the regime after the armistice had been concluded. And that — that continuation of the war in the empire, that coordination with the British, that using the empire as a point of attack on the Germans, and ultimately of reentry into France — that panicked Hitler. And he said to Mussolini that he gave to the French, after all, more lenient armistice terms in order to prevent such an eventuality, because he did not want to disperse his forces; that full occupation of France wasn't worth it. He didn't want to have to fight the French in the imperial bases.

And the other part of the strategy, of course: the Breton beachhead. And what we're talking about are the beachheads inside France, those places that the Germans can't capture. What we are talking about is guerrilla war. We are talking about guerrilla war. And it never came to a vote in the ministry. Reynaud gave up on the 16th of June 1940, simply resigned, and urged President [Albert] Lebrun to name as his successor Philippe Pétain, Marshal Pétain. And the Pétain ministry took over and immediately asked for an armistice. And so Pétain goes to the radio then on the 17th of June of 1940, and says this: "With a heavy heart, Frenchmen, I tell you today to stop fighting. We are seeking an armistice." This was days, incidentally, before the negotiators even left Bordeaux in order to start the negotiations or before terms were even set upon, and Pétain went and said, "Stop fighting." And the fighting did stop.

And there really is a question, and the question is why? And the question, I think, has to be answered in terms of the great, and tremendous, and profound fear of disorder. There was a profound fear on the part of the traditional elites of France — the officers, those who were the high civil servants, those who were the capitalists — a terrific fear that the exiled government would leave a vacuum in France. And that into that vacuum and into that disorder might cause something that would oust them permanently, that would destroy that whole armature of dominion and subordination. How else to think of the way they looked at France in that June of 1940?

Because, you see, already where the German armies went, there was terrific dislocation. Whole cities and villages were being denuded. People had taken to the road. The administrators, the civil servants had left; there was a vacuum. And people were doing for themselves. And there is General Weygand in a ministry meeting on the 13th of June, and there is a *coup de téléphone*, and he goes to the telephone and comes back — and he gives credence to this legend — and he tells the ministry, "Maurice Thorez and the French Communists have just seized the Élysée Palace in Paris and have declared themselves the government." And it's that kind of paranoia.

And the documents are rich. Listen, then, to Marshal Pétain at the cabinet meeting of the 13th of June of 1940: "To deprive France of her natural defenders, that indispensable administrative structure, is to deliver her to chaos and to make her revival impossible." How do you read that? "To make her revival impossible": it means to restore what has been traditional and what has been hierarchical in French society. Or take, for example, that prefect under Vichy, Jean Angeli, who was prefect of the Finistère and who said at his trial in November of 1944 — an explanation of why most prefects stayed at their jobs and served Vichy, and ultimately served the Germans — and he puts it this way: "Those prefects who stayed, as almost all of them did, understood that prefects have a *charge de dette*, a care of souls, that it is they who must rule and regulate." Now, that should not surprise us.

It should not surprise us if we think of Weygand and if we think of Pétain. Weygand, after all, is a general, and he's not young. He's 73 years old, and he's had an honorable career of serving order. And he signed a petition in favor of that Colonel [Hubert-Joseph] Henry, for example, in the Dreyfus period, who forged documents against Dreyfus because he said it was done in the interest of "order." And then he's off in Poland in 1920 with De Gaulle, keeping order against the Russians armies to defend the Poles. He's full of order [*laughter*]. And Pétain — now, Pétain is not exactly a bright fresh face on the France scene. In 1940, he's 84 years old, the hero of Verdun. Now, in very good shape; everybody comments on what a great physique Philippe Pétain had. The fact is, he married at 64 a girl of 20, fared extremely well, and, consequently, much honored for this [*laughter*]. And he himself said, when he was 87 years old in 1943, that he was left with only two passions in life: the infantry and sex [*laughter*]. Well, if you can imagine, there is a man of extraordinary proportions here in Pétain. It suffices to say, a little bit gaga as a political leader; not quite with it, a little bit tired at ministry meetings. Going to sleep every once in a while; in the midst of a discussion, for example, on marshaling tanks. This is before the armistice. Can the French really get tanks together to stop the Germans? Suddenly he bolts up and gives a long discourse on the uses of carrier pigeons. Not quite with it [*laughter*].

And yet, with Pétain: a view, a *Weltanschauung*. Something really that is important, because at the center of it is order; that his whole life is about that. The whole life is about natural elites being the fathers to the other people. He is the hero of Verdun in 1916. But he's just as a military man, like Eisenhower, not like Montgomery. He moves only very cautiously, only when he is sure of success. And then he becomes the chief of staff in 1917; he replaces [General Robert] Nivelle. And that is precisely the time when there are all those mutinies in the French Army. And suddenly, Pétain faces disorder in the army, and of course he has the explanation: foreign influences, agitators in the army. His next success is in the Rif War of 1925. He puts down the disorder of the Rif tribesmen in Morocco. And then he goes off as the ambassador to Franco's Spain in 1939, to do his honor to order. And he is the one who, when he came back and talked to William Bullitt, the American ambassador in France in 1940, said in a straight face that "All of the misery that France has suffered is because of those damnably anti-clerical and radical school teachers." That we understand.

And we understand why a Pierre Laval, a politician of the Third Republic, why he would think that disorder was honorable. Because that Laval, after all, was somebody who had exploited the Third Republic for his own ends — had exploited it for his own power — that we all know. This is a boy who grows up in the Auvergne, of a father who is a little petty entrepreneur: the local mail man, the local innkeeper, the local butcher. You put it all together you have an entrepreneur in the provinces. And, consequently, Laval becomes a lawyer of the left to begin with, and then he moves to the right, and his fortune grows, and he becomes very rich. And he is ten times a minister and four times a prime minister, and then he is ousted by the Popular Front. And he comes back as the assistant to Pétain, as the vice prime minister. And he says — and it's quite

fascinating — he says then to the Foreign Minister, Paul Baudouin, in 1940: "The parliament in 1936 vomited me up, and now I will vomit it up" [*laughter*]. Not an elegant phrase, but it indicates, after all, why order — why that kind of discipline, why that kind of refusal to leave a vacuum to the left — was all-important.

But, you see, think of it with a Reynaud. With a Reynaud — who really thought that the British were not finished, who thought that the Americans would come in, who thought that the war might yet be won — and yet he gives up. He gives up without a fight. Reynaud is a man of the banks. And his *grise*, his *éminence grise*, the man who makes so many of the decisions for him, Paul Baudouin — who is polytechnician, who comes out of the great engineering school and the great administration in the finance ministry, who is himself a director of the Bank of Indochina — all of these things mean that a Reynaud can't pierce glass.

Well, they make the armistice. And the armistice, in brief, does this: the armistice of the 25th of June 1940 gives to the Germans 55% of French territory, 62% of her population, 66% of her arable land, 73% of her industrial workers, and it leaves the rest — the 45% with the capital at Vichy — to autonomy. And it means that the French Army is to be demobilized, except for a small force to depend on Vichy; it means that, in Article 12, a very cruel article, all political refugees who have come into France will be turned over to the Nazis. And that included, for example, a distinguished socialist like [Marxist theorist Rudolf] Hilferding. And then the navy; that the French Navy would be demobilized. That except for a small force to defend, after all, the French Empire, the rest would go to the home ports and be disarmed, but be nominally in French hands; that the Germans wouldn't take it.

And, so you see, the negotiators at Rethondes, those that made the armistice, claimed that they had come out pretty well. That France, by collaborating, had scored three things: it kept its empire, it kept its fleet, and it had sovereignty in 45% of the country. Not a bad deal. All of those will disappear within two years because you must remember that, by the end of 1942, comes the crisis in the whole German war effort. That on the 23 of October of 1942 comes that attack at El Alamein, in which [General Erwin] Rommel's tanks, after all, are attacked by British tanks, in which Rommel — who has penetrated to as far as 200 miles from Suez — is finally defeated. And then, on the 7th and 8th of November, came the landing of the Allies in North Africa; the 31st of January, the surrender of [General Friedrich] Paulus in Stalingrad.

The war is turning badly for the Germans, and they take the bull by the horns in France. And on the 11th of November of 1942, they occupy the rest of France. And all of that Vichy sovereignty, which had been paper sovereignty anyway, disappears. And when they do that, they try to seize the French fleet and the French commanders scuttle it. And the Allies are now in North Africa and the empire. And all of those three positions are lost. But that's not our question.

Our question is: What did they expect, this traditional ruling class, out of that armistice? And that is fascinating. Because we say order was at the center of their calculations, to be sure. But that doesn't distort the subject. Let's take the excuses and the apologies — can you stay ten minutes? — take the excuses and the apologetics, because there is lots of rich apologetics about Vichy. And Vichy supporters always say — during the Vichy administration, at their trials, and those who have written, because there are plenty of Vichyites, after all, who are in power all over the place in France — you don't have to be an antifascist to have risen in the Fourth and the Fifth Republics. And, consequently, all of the apologetics run around three things. Run, first of all, around the theme of the double game; and secondly, the theme of presence; and third, the theme of mitigating Nazi harshness.

And the idea of the double games is this: that, after all, the Vichy people — the ones who made the armistice, that ruling class — they knew that ultimately there would be the liberation. They really did foresee that, but they were simply playing for time. All of that is a perfect lie. They never thought that. All the documents concur on one thing: that the people who made the accord at Rethondes, those who supported Vichy thought from the very beginning that Great Britain had lost the war, that Germany had won, and what they desperately wanted was to be in on a Nazi-dominated Europe in which they should be a viable economic partner.

It's only in those terms, for example, that you can understand the joy with which Vichy administers that catastrophe at Mers-el-Kébir: Mers-el-Kébir, which is that great naval sinking by the British of part of the French fleet in the Algerian waters of Mers-el-Kébir on the 4th of July of 1940. After that happened, there was joy. And think of it in these terms: that Reynaud, on the 28th of March, had made an agreement, in 1940, with the British. He had gone up to London, and he and Churchill had signed an agreement which said that neither Great Britain nor France would ever seek or sign a separate armistice or a separate peace. And suddenly in seeking this armistice there was a terrific kind of ambiguity: hadn't they broken their agreement with the British? And then Churchill, very worried about what would happen to that French fleet, and he sent out General [Harold] Alexander down on the 19th of January to talk to Admiral [François] Darlan, who was head of the French Navy, and Darlan agreed that the French fleet would never be turned over to the Nazis.

And still Churchill wasn't satisfied with that. The agreement was signed on the 21st of June, that armistice agreement, and the British felt they had to move. They couldn't permit that fleet, which was the second-largest fleet in Europe, to fall into German hands. And, consequently, on the 4th of July, they moved. And they seized all French ships in British home ports. And then they went to Mers-el-Kébir, which is an Algerian port, and they gave an ultimatum. And they told the French Navy that it either had to capitulate, or it had to scuttle its own ships, or sail off into far distant colonial ports. And all of this was denied: these ultimatums were refused. And, consequently, the British simply sunk the part of the fleet that was at Mers-el-Kébir, killing

1,267 French sailors and scuttling really half of the French fleet. Now, all of that, you see, should have been a tragedy. But to those who were at Vichy it was not, because it broke, decisively, any tie with Great Britain. And it pushed them very closely into an alliance with Germany.

And the idea, you see, that then emerged was a grand imperialist idea that really obsesses an Anglophobe like Admiral Darlan. And it is the idea that, when Great Britain loses, her empire will be divvied up, that that empire in the Far East and in Africa will be divided and that France will be a gainer — a perfect, nonsensical idea. To think that the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese would permit those rich prizes to fall into French hands: perfectly idiotic. But that, after all, was the design. There is General [Charles] Huntzinger, for example, that good French general, going to the armistice commission meeting at Wiesbaden in July of 1940, and presenting a plan. And the plan is that the French should seize the oil fields of Iraq, and should seize the pipelines that go to Syria and that go to the Mediterranean ports, and that the Germans and French together should take over the British-controlled Iraqi Petroleum Corporation. Why? Why? So that the Germans and the French together control the petroleum supply of Europe and oust the Anglo-American monopoly. And there is [François] Lehideux (who is the nephew of Louis Renault, the auto manufacturer), in very close collaboration in the beginning of 1941 with one Colonel [Max] Thoenissen of the German auto industry, and saying: "Look, if there is a coalition of French and Italian and German auto production, we will control the world." And there's nothing about a double game. There's passion — passion to get into that German-controlled Europe.

And we talk about sovereignty. And that's nonsense. And the second argument, after all, that France maintained a certain amount of sovereignty: they maintained it only at German sufferance, and as the Germans wanted. I gave you one illustration. German industrialists came in the summer of 1940, and they said they wanted French factories to produce war goods for them. And the French manufacturers were delighted. It was a marvelous market. And Louis Renault produced a great number of tanks for the Nazis. And Berliet produced thousands of trucks for the Nazis, and they grew rich upon it. And the government of Vichy intervened and said, "Well, you need our approval. But, of course, we give it." On the 27th of July, a decree by Vichy which said, "Yes, you can contract with French plants for German war equipment." The 2nd of September, a very brusque note from the German High Command in France, saying, "We don't need your permission."

Or, the most decisive of the arguments, mitigation — that things were a lot easier for the French because the French government was collaborating — and that's perfect nonsense and cruel. It's not true for the Jews. Hitler didn't ask anything of the French Jews, didn't ask anything of Vichy until the Final Solution, until he just wanted to round them all up and send them to extermination camps. But that came in 1942, and Vichy began early, the 4th of October of 1940, with great enthusiasm: the law which ousted Jews from all public service, from the judiciary, from the civil

service, from all elected bodies, and from all cultural institutions; the law of the 5th of October, which said that all foreign Jews should be rounded up and put in special concentration camps. By 1942, there were 22,000 in those camps so that they could easily be herded off. The 31st of March of 1941, it is Xavier Vallat—who is himself a complete psychopath, a mutilated war veteran who hates Jews with a passion, who says he will cleanse the French economy of Jewish influence—and so comes the law that says that, now, all Jewish property, whether business or real estate, should be put under provisional commissioners, and those provisional commissioners can sell on the open market. You see what all of that is: it is open season for profiteers. And all of that is before 1942. And when Hitler asked for the Jews in the round-up, Vichy gave them easily. In all, 65,000 Jews transported from France, of whom, after the war, 2,800 returned.

Worse than that, they're your own people, your workers. And Vichy has always said, after all, that the forced labor was less in France, and that because of the collaboration; that until 1942 and '43, there really was no forced labor. But, you see, that begs the big question: the Germans didn't need French labor then. They had good slave labor from Russia and from Poland and from women. And, consequently, what happened was that when they needed French labor, they got it. Because, ultimately, France was the largest supplier of labor inside Germany from the outside occupied countries, and sent off a million and a half French workers. And Laval always said, and he said in his defense, that it was not forced, it was voluntary, until November of 1943...

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... Germany in order to reconstruct society. It wasn't just a holding operation; it was to be a surgical operation, a whole new society. It was *Dieu, Patrie, and Famille*: it was God, Fatherland and Family. Well, that was Marshal Pétain's slogan...

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... and it was the moral, or the National Revolution. And it was to cement society around a corporation; it was to restore the traditional elites to their authority. It was, really, all of that kind of *paternaliste* revolution.

But really that's not the story. The story is not that. The story is the systematic smashing of all instrumentalities by which human beings can express themselves or really express their selfhood. It is, of course, that kind of mastery over the educational system in which nothing should be taught, and nothing should be conveyed that really stirs the social system. It is that emphasis upon large families, that emphasis upon women in the kitchen, that emphasis upon marriage and the family, which is so pernicious and so frequently used by the fascists. And it is, of course, the permanent stripping of the working class of any of its instrumentalities: the unions gone, the right to strike gone. And industry in corporations, industry in groups, in which the weak will be

siphoned out and the strong will be triumphant. It prefaces [President Georges] Pompidou and [interior minister Raymond] Marcellin. It prefaces what Nelson Rockefeller would do. It prefaces a great deal of that systemization and that rationalization of the counterrevolution.

And it is so vengeful. When Elizabeth Hardwick wrote in the *New York Review of Books* that the elections of November of 1972 in America were pure vengeance — "The vitriol of people: the old against the young, the white against the black, the employer against the worker, those who have against those who don't, those who don't want anything stirred up" — she was really making a description which was institutionalized and systematized in Vichy. And why? Because that damnably poor, pathetic little Popular Front had dared to make those damnable two-week paid holidays. [*laughter, applause*]